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**APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES  
LETTERS PATENT**

**ON-LINE SUBSCRIPTION SYSTEM AND METHOD**

Inventor:

**Ari AARNIO**

## **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

### **1. Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to the provision of services over a wide-area network and, more particularly, to a system and a method of providing audio and/or video data to a subscriber using a wide-area network such as the Internet.

### **2. Description of the Related Art**

In order to receive the newest and latest entertainment or informational products such as books, music compact disks (CD's), or movie tapes on a regular basis, consumers are often required to join various clubs such as a book club, a CD club, and/or a movie club. These clubs send periodically, typically on a monthly basis, a preselected number of books, CDs, or movies to their members. Delivery of these products by mail or similar services is usually relatively slow so the members do not necessarily receive the most current products. Also, when customers choose not to buy these products, the overall costs of providing the service increase, which inevitably raise the price of these products.

With the advent of the Internet, there is now available on the World Wide Web a multitude of entertainment/informational resources readily accessible by the consumers. To retrieve such products, the consumers employ browsers installed on their desktop computers to search and identify the appropriate Web sites containing the desired products.

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Now, users of mobile equipment such as wireless phones and palm-sized personal computers also demand, as do users of desktop computers, these same products. However, searching and browsing such information using mobile equipment may not be practical, as the mobile equipment has limited processing capability, memory, and battery power. Consequently, the mobile equipment has a small display for processing the information.

U.S. Patent No. 5,914,941 discloses a portable digital device for storing audio information on a hard drive, in a flash EPROM, or other solid state non-volatile memory. The device may be connected to an ISDN telephone, a digital satellite broadcast device, a two-way interactive cable device, or an Internet Service Provider. However, there is no disclosure of a system for distributing information to subscribers automatically and periodically or a system for distributing text and audio-video data customized for a particular user on a subscription basis over a wireless communication network.

Accordingly, there is a need for a system and method for providing consumers entertainment and informational products, tailored to their preferences and interests, on a regular basis through a wide-area network and a wireless communication network.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide a system and a method for distributing audio-video data from a database to a subscriber automatically and periodically using a wide-area network and a wireless communication network.

5           According to an aspect of the invention, the system includes a mobile terminal and a server that can access data representing audio-video information and/or text desired by a subscriber. The server can also access data relating to the capabilities of the mobile terminal, and preferences and financial information of a subscriber so that the desired data or product may be downloaded to the mobile terminal automatically and periodically. The server charges the subscriber an agreed sum for the downloaded product.

10           According to another aspect of the invention, the subscription server periodically sends to the mobile terminal information concerning products available for downloading. The subscriber may reply by sending a response through the mobile terminal indicating whether the subscriber wishes to receive the products. The response may be formatted as a Short Message Service (SMS) message or an e-mail to the subscription server. If the subscriber accepts and specifies a product, the server downloads the specified product to the mobile terminal. If the subscriber does not accept any of the products, the subscriber sends a cancellation message to the subscription server; the subscriber may optionally place a voice call to the operator of the subscription server.

20           In one embodiment, a subscription server provides online subscription services to a user of a mobile terminal through the Internet. The mobile terminal transmits to the subscription

server user-specific information relating to at least one of the user's mobile terminal capabilities, the user's preferences of products, and information relating to the user. The subscription server receives the user-specific information relating to the at least one of the user's mobile terminal capabilities, the user's preferences of products, and information relating to the user. The subscription server sends to the mobile terminal at predetermined time intervals, in response to user-specific information relating to at least one of the user's mobile terminal capabilities and the user's preferences of products and the information relating to the user, information related to a product when the user is authorized to receive the product based on the user-specific information received from the mobile terminal. The subscription server receives from the mobile terminal a request indicating whether the user wishes to receive or not receive the product. The subscription server transmits the product in digital form to the mobile terminal when the user indicates a desire to receive the product.

In another embodiment, the entire product (e.g., book, music, etc.) is downloaded to customers' mobile terminals, including a special "gateway lock". The customer can, for example, read the first page of the downloaded book, or listen to one-minute of the downloaded music etc. and after that the "gateway lock" prohibits the use of the product and the user must choose whether to buy the product or not. If the answer is "yes", the "gateway lock" opens and the rest of the downloaded product can be accessed by the customer and fees are charges according to the terms of an agreement or club rules already agreed to by the customer. This embodiment has the advantage of lower overall costs. One possibility is that the product is sent back to the server so that the server knows that the subscription is cancelled.

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Routing of data packets between a sender (e.g., the subscription server) and a receiver (e.g., a mobile terminal) is described in U.S. patent application serial number 09/256,832, which is incorporated herein by reference.

5 Other objects and features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. It is to be understood, however, that the drawings are designed solely for purposes of illustration and not as a definition of the limits of the invention, for which reference should be made to the appended claims. It should be further understood that the drawings are not necessarily drawn to scale and that, unless otherwise indicated, they are merely intended to conceptually illustrate the structures and procedures described herein.

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Fig. 1 illustrates an on-line subscription system using a wide-area network in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

5 Fig. 2 depicts another embodiment of the on-line subscription system of the present invention; and

Fig. 3 is a flow chart describing an embodiment of the inventive method.

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**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENTLY PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS**SUB  
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Fig. 1 illustrates an on-line subscription system 10 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The system 10 includes a mobile or a wireless communication network 12 for communicating with a mobile terminal 14 including, for example, a palm-sized personal computer, a Personal Digital Assistant, and a wireless phone. The wireless communication network 12 is connected to a wide area network such as the Internet 16 through an Internet access 18 such as a gateway server. Advantageously, the system 10 includes a subscription server 20, connected to an Intranet 22 through an Intranet access 24, for automatically and regularly communicating data to a subscriber, i.e., a user who is registered with the subscription server 20. A user is registered when the user submits to the subscription server 20 the requisite user-specific information, which will be stored in a subscription database accessible by the subscription server. The user-specific information includes the capabilities of the user's hardware, the user's financial information, and the user's preferences. Information on the user's hardware capabilities (e.g., user agent, terminal type, network type etc.) enables the server to download data in a format compatible with the mobile terminal's protocol and the user network's protocol. The user's financial information such as, for example, the user's name, address, bank, credit or debit card account and other requisite billing information is included so that fees can be charged against the user's account as appropriate. As one example, the user's preferences are included so that the subscription server 20 can automatically seek out and retrieve digitally-formatted products preferred or otherwise interested by the user (e.g., works of favorite writers, composers, singers, artists, music bands, orchestras, etc.) locally or from other vendor



servers connected to the Internet for transmission to the user's mobile terminal using, for example, a search engine.

Fig. 2 illustrates another embodiment of the inventive on-line subscription system

10. The mobile terminal 14 includes a Bluetooth-capable transceiver configured to communicate  
5 wirelessly using Bluetooth technology (i.e., using low power RF link) with a Bluetooth-compliant  
device 26 such as, for example, an electronic book ("e-book"), an audio player, or a multimedia  
player for displaying or playing audio-visual information. The Bluetooth-capable transceiver may  
for example be a digital broadcast transceiver 30 for communication with a broadcast network 27  
or a third generation General Packet Radio Service (3G or GPRS) terminal 28 for communication  
10 with a 3G GPRS network 25. The Bluetooth-capable transceiver is a device that operates at a  
radio frequency of about 2.4 GHz and is capable of establishing radio links with other compliant  
devices within a predetermined distance of each other (e.g., typically less than about 30 feet).  
Thus, user of the transceiver 26 may move about a facility, but still maintain access to the user's  
e-mail, contacts, or appointments through a Local Area Network (LAN). If unable to display or  
15 play the downloaded product from the subscription server 20, the Bluetooth-capable transceiver  
may store the downloaded product and then transfer (e.g., using wireless or wireline devices) the  
downloaded product to, for example, the electronic book 26 (or a laptop computer) for  
presentation, e.g., viewing and/or listening.

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20 PY 7 The subscription server 20 may access data or product from a local database or  
from a vendor server 32 (operated by, for example, a book publisher) connected to the Internet.  
In the case where direct access to the vendor server 32 is required, the subscription server 20

sends a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) message (a conventional method of locating or retrieving resources from the World Wide Web) addressed to the vendor server 32 and retrieves the desired data from the vendor server 32. Optionally, the subscription server 20 sends a URL message to a "shopping market" 33 Web site which then redirects the subscription server 20 to other vendor Web sites (e.g., various book publisher's servers) to retrieve the product interested by the user as determined by the user's preferences. It is not necessary that user preferences determine when and what information is sent but the book club (or the subscription server 20) itself decides what and when should be sent depending on the collection of the items the book club is interested in. The user preferences may, for example, be a predetermined time period (e.g., once a month) the product is transmitted to the user. For example, for an electronic book club, the text of one or more books is transmitted on the first of each month by the subscription server 20 and downloaded into the mobile terminal 14.

Fig. 3 is a flowchart describing an embodiment of the on-line subscription method of the present invention. Initially, in step 100, the subscription server 20 determines whether user-specific information for a user exists. In step 102, if the user-specific information exists (or if the user is authorized to receive information from the subscription server 20), the subscription server 20 retrieves (locally, or remotely from a vendor server by, for example, sending a URL request) and transmits to the mobile terminal 14 information relating to available products at each predetermined period of time. The products are selected based on the user's preferences obtained from the previously submitted user-specific information. If user-specific information does not exist for the user (or the user is not authorized to receive information from the subscription server

20), that user must register with the subscription server 20 and supply the requisite information before he can receive product-related information from the subscription server 20, as indicated in step 104. In step 106, the subscription server 20 assesses and sends to the mobile terminal 14 the product-related information. In step 108, the user determines whether to purchase a product (e.g., MP3 (MPEG, layer 3) coded music data and/or JPEG coded image data etc.) based on the product-related information. If not, the user sends a cancellation request from the mobile terminal 14 to the subscription server 20 in step 110. The subscription server 20 then cancels the product in step 112. The cancellation message may be sent to a special address specified in the message sent. When the server 20 receives the message, it will add a cancellation mark to the subscriber information. In step 109, it is determined whether the product is included in the message. If the product is included in the message, the product is transmitted to the terminal 14 in step 114. If the product is not included in the message, the subscription server 20 retrieves and transmits (i.e., downloads) the product to the mobile terminal 14 based on the network capabilities specified by the user. The mobile terminal 14 then indicates to the user whether the mobile terminal 14 is capable of presenting the product based on the user-specific information in step 116. If so, the mobile terminal 14 receives and presents the product by, for example, using an MP3 player to convert the product into sounds in step 118. If not, the mobile terminal 14 transfers the product to a Bluetooth-capable player 26 such as, for example, an electronic book, an audio player, and/or a multimedia player etc. in step 120. In the case where text and/or JPEG image data are transferred to the electronic book 26. The user may view one or more pages on the electronic book 26 as the user depresses sequentially a signaling switch thereon to cause

transfer of additional data for display thereon. Thereafter, the subscription server 20 charges the user's credit or debit card account the price of the downloaded product.

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In another embodiment, the entire product (e.g., book, music, etc.) is downloaded to customers' mobile terminals, including a special "gateway lock". The customer can, for example, read the first page of the downloaded book, or listen to one-minute of the downloaded music etc. and after that the "gateway lock" prohibits the use of the product and the user is requested to decide whether to buy the product or not. If the answer is "yes", the "gateway lock" opens (by, for example, a decoding message or instruction from the subscription server 20) and the rest of the downloaded product can then be accessed by the customer and fees are charges according to the terms of an agreement or club rules already agreed to by the customer. This embodiment has the advantage of lower overall costs. It is contemplated that instead of canceling the product, the product may be sent back to the server so that the server knows that the subscription is cancelled. It is also contemplated that instead of sending the product back to the server, the downloaded product includes an access code for unlocking the gateway lock so that the customer can access the entire product.

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The steps of this embodiment include the following. The mobile terminal 14 receives a free sample (e.g., a portion of a book or a musical piece) and displays or plays the free sample to the customer. After displaying the free sample (of predetermined length), the customer is asked whether he or she wants to continue. If the customer indicates a desire to continue, the mobile terminal clears the gateway lock so that the customer can continue his or her enjoyment of

the product and the requisite fees are displayed to the customer and charged to the customer's account.

In still another embodiment, the subscription server 20 transmits offers to select mobile terminals of non-members (i.e., those who have not yet registered with the subscription server 20) inviting the non-members to register with the subscription server 20 (e.g., to join a book club). The offers may include free downloads of contents (e.g., books, music, etc.). Preferably, the non-members may select one or more free downloads from a predetermined list -- only upon acceptance of the offer to register with the subscription server 20. Thereafter, the new member user receives messages (such as, for example, newsletters, samples, and other offers) from the subscription server 20 periodically (e.g., monthly).

Thus, while there have shown and described and pointed out fundamental novel features of the invention as applied to a preferred embodiment thereof, it will be understood that various omissions and substitutions and changes in the form and details of the devices illustrated, and in their operation, may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit of the invention. For example, it is expressly intended that all combinations of those elements and/or method steps which perform substantially the same function in substantially the same way to achieve the same results are within the scope of the invention. Moreover, it should be recognized that structures and/or elements and/or method steps shown and/or described in connection with any disclosed form or embodiment of the invention may be incorporated in any other disclosed or described or suggested form or embodiment as a general matter of design

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choice. It is the intention, therefore, to be limited only as indicated by the scope of the claims appended hereto.

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